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Assessing Perceptions of Effectiveness for a Third Sector: A Study of Organized Neighborhood Associations and Community Clubs and the People They Serve

Cover Page Footnote

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**Assessing Perceptions of Effectiveness for a Third Sector:
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They Serve**

Everyone wants to feel safe in their own neighborhood. The path of that safe feeling can be different depending on the neighborhood as a community's security problems can be solved in a variety of ways. Individuals and small groups of neighbors can informally address concerns within their neighborhood. Individuals can take safety precautions such as buying a weapon, adding locks to their home, or—in extreme situations—withdrawing from community life. Small grouping of neighbors can informally agree to watch out for each other's property. Beyond actions taken by residents, governmental and police agencies can help by taking formal measures, by passing laws, and changing policing tactics to address problems. Organizations can offer monetary support or assistance in mobilizing communities in need. For profits organizations can create initiatives to invest in the businesses' communities. Nonprofit organizations can assist neighborhoods in interacting with government and police officials. Additionally, nonprofit organizations can aid in providing opportunities for community residents to engage with one another. Moreover, nonprofits can provide support services to help address deficiencies in a community. Nonprofit organizations, such as the Red Cross, the Boys and Girls Club, neighborhood or homeowner associations, and the YMCA require individuals to voluntarily participate to further their initiatives.

Previous studies on voluntary associations center on their quantitative effectiveness in implementing a specific policy, program, or initiative. However, it is important to understand how

local neighborhood conditions influence residents' perceptions of how effective organized neighborhood associations and community clubs/organizations (ONACC) are; this is imperative because the success of community-based efforts is predicated on their capacity to mobilize the individuals in a community to shift broader policies and procedures.¹ If individuals believe that a problem-solving approach is not effective or is only marginally effective, then it stands to reasons that they will not participate or use that method. When residents find one or more approaches highly effective, this may indicate more enthusiastic resolve to pursue those methods, instead of others.² This study uses multilevel models built from 1,565 survey respondents in Seattle to examine whether the existence of individual factors, such as personal fear, social integration, prior participation in block activities and perceived neighborhood characteristics, such as disorder, trust, and informal social control influence perception of ONACC being effective at solving major problems in the respondents' neighborhood.

ONACC confront many of the root causes of disorder, such as problems in the social, physical, and economic environment of the neighborhood, and thus may represent the most promising approach to urban stability.³ These economic or social problems are often coupled with the overall neighborhood conditions of weak neighboring and social ties, lack of participation and involvement, and low informal control.⁴ ONACC may provide additional adult educational services, a location for youth to go instead of "hanging out" on the street corner, help acquiring additional protective services, and individuals a safe place to engage in neighboring activities. Of these concerns that ONACC address, a lengthy body of literature examines the roles played by neighborhood structural conditions,⁵ such as social integration and social control,⁶ harmful

conditions, including disorder and personal fear,⁷ and other social problems, such as lack of resources.⁸

Social ties and engaging in neighborly behaviors are extremely important in developing trust and shared norms among neighbors, developing a sense of community, exchanging important information, and establishing informal social control.⁹ This trust may facilitate enthusiasm in problem-solving measures that are deemed less intrusive. Sampson and colleagues argue that neighborhood collectiveness includes a working trust among residents, as well as the willingness to intervene to achieve social control.¹⁰ This collectiveness enhances the ability of residents to meet common goals and preserve shared social values.¹¹ When residents meet with each other and interact, they form social ties or increase their sense of familiarity with one another. Usually more familiarity assists in creating prosocial norms, however, Sampson finds that improved familiarity can increase awareness of negative physical and social conditions, which may result in fear of crime or retaliation and reduces citizen involvement in civic and local activities.¹² Although neighborhoods that have adequate level of functioning and cohesiveness may not require additional resources and may also be primed to implement ONACC missions,¹³ this fact should not preclude the examination of the circumstances that influence residents' perception of ONACC effectiveness.

The Current Study

As discussed above, there is limited investigation into the perceived effectiveness of ONACC. This study aims to address this gap in the literature, by simultaneously examining whether individual and perceived neighborhood factors are associated with perceptions of high

efficacy for ONACC. Research questions were formulated, include the following: Do increases in individual interactions influence the perceptions of efficacy for ONACC? Does personal fear influence perceptions of ONACC as highly effective at solving major problems in the neighborhood? Does respondents' participation in Seattle Police Department or other block activity influence perceptions that ONACC are highly effective? Do perceptions of neighborhood trust influence perceptions of ONACC effectiveness? Do increases in disorder impact respondents' perceptions of ONACC, as highly effective at solving major problems? Do perceptions of informal social control impact respondents' perceptions of ONACC efficacy? This study's null hypothesis states that controlling for the other variables of analysis, the predictor variables have no statistically significant effect on the perception that ONACC are highly effective at solving major problems in the respondent's neighborhood.

Methodology

This research examined models for the perceived high efficacy of ONACC based on individual-level constructs of previously researched neighborhood-level factors. To understand ONACC, this study analyzed secondary data from the simple random sample portion of the Seattle Neighborhoods and Crime Survey (SNCS). This data was made available by the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research.¹⁴ Seattle, Washington is in the Northwestern portion of the United States and in 2000 was ranked twenty-fourth in size, with a population of approximately 560,000.¹⁵ Of this population, 70.1 percent identified as white and 50.1 percent identified as female.

The SNCS collected telephonic data from adults surveyed from 2002-2003. The Social and Behavioral Research Institute (SBRI) at California State University-San Marcos conducted the collection. The “random sample” portion collected data using the cluster sampling method and used a modified version of the 15-attempt protocol designed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey.¹⁶ The cluster samples were drawn and two block groups were randomly selected from each of the 123 census tracts in Seattle, then nine households were randomly selected from each block group.¹⁷ The response rate was over 51 percent, resulting in a sample of 2220 households.¹⁸

Measures

Outcome Variable: Perceived High Neighborhood Association Efficacy was measured by the specific question: “How effective would the following approach be in resolving major problems around your neighborhood: organized neighborhood associations or community clubs?” Responses were based on a rating scale ranging from “Not at All” to “Highly Effective” and reverse coded where “Highly Effective” equals two, “Somewhat Effective” equals one, and “Not at All” equals zero.

A few social demographic control variables were included in the analysis. Sex, a dichotomous variable, captured the self-identified sex of the respondent; females are coded the value of one. Age in years was included as a continuous variable. Income was measured on an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (< \$25,000) to 3 (> \$75,000). Typically, income is examined as a continuous measure. To address this issue, respondents’ income variables were included as binary measures, where income ranging from \$25,000-\$75,000, was coded as one with all other

categories coded as zero. Likewise, income that was greater than \$75,000 was coded as one, in a separate dummy variable, where all other income was coded as zero. Respondents' income less than \$25,000 was used as the income reference group. Residence length was operationalized as the number of years the respondents reported living at their current addresses. Home ownership was included as a recorded binary measure (Yes = 1). Educational attainment was measured, in the survey, as an ordinal scale ranging from one (high school or less) to four (graduate school/professional). Respondents' race/ethnicity variables were a series of binary measures indicating whether respondents identified as: Black, Asian, Latino. Respondents identifying as white were the reference group.

Predictor Variables: Social embeddedness:

Individual interaction ($\bar{x} = 6.07$) was measured as a series of Likert scale items asking the respondent, "How often have you partaken in an action with a neighbor?" The response scale ranged from "0 = Never" to "2 = Often." The specific items in this measure include: watched a neighbor's home, borrowed tools or small food items, had dinner or lunch with a neighbor, helped a neighbor with a problem, asked about personal things, and said hello or talked (Cronbach's Alpha; $\alpha = 0.79$).

In this study, personal fear measures a respondents' general sense of safety.¹⁹ Personal fear ($\bar{x} = 7.11$) is a measure of an individual's safety concerns. The measure is constructed about combining four items, which asked: "How often do you worry or think about being physically attacked by a stranger in your neighborhood; How about someone breaking into your home and stealing your property; How safe do you think your neighborhood is from crime and criminals;

and As far as crime in your neighborhood is concerned, how much do you worry about the safety of each of the following persons currently living in your household: You, Yourself?” (Cronbach’s Alpha; $\alpha = 0.72$). Response categories for thinking about an assault and property crime ranged from 1 (less than once a month) to 4 (every day). Additionally, neighborhood safety responses ranged from 1 (very safe) to 4 (very unsafe). Finally, worrying about personal safety ranged from 1 (not at all concerned) to 4 (very concerned).

In this study, the impact of prior participation is measured by examining self-reported participation in activities sponsored by the Seattle police department or activities within the neighborhood block.²⁰ The specific questions asked include the following: “How often have you participated in a block activity sponsored by the Seattle Police Department (SPD)?” Also, respondents were asked, “How often have you participated in any other organized block activity?” Each question is examined as an individual measure. For both questions, the initial response categories are: “1 - Often,” “2 - Sometimes,” “3 - Never.” Both measures were recorded as being binary, by combining the categories of “Often” and “Sometimes” as 1, and recording “Never” as 0.

Like other studies, the disorder measure is constructed by asking the following five questions (perceived disorder): “How much of a problem would you say the following is: groups of teenagers hanging around the street, litter/garbage/trash on the streets, spray-painted graffiti on buildings and streets, abandoned houses and rundown buildings, and neighbors who cause trouble or make noise?” These questions are consistent with previous research.²¹ The disorder measure’s,

Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.75$), responses were recorded where 0= Not a Problem; 1= A Small Problem; 2 = A Big Problem.

Neighborhood trust is measured by asking a series of four questions to assess if the respondent agrees that: 1) "You can count on adults in this neighborhood to watch out that children are safe and don't get into trouble; 2) People in this neighborhood can be trusted; 3) People of different races trust each other in this neighborhood, and 4) People around here are willing to help their neighbors." Responses for this measure were based on a Likert-type scale and the measure's Cronbach's Alpha is $\alpha = 0.78$. The response categories were reverse coded and ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The two internal categories correspond with the following: disagree=2 and agree=3.

Informal social control was measured as a series of Likert scale items asking the respondent, "How likely is it that your neighbor will do something about children's actions?" Each response scale ranges from "0 = Very Unlikely" to "3 = Very Likely." The specific items in this measure include: skipping school, spray painting graffiti, disrespecting adults, and fighting in the neighborhood. This measure has a Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha = 0.76$.

Analytical Strategy

Listwise deletion was used to address missing data. The current investigation includes 1,565 subjects from blocks that are nested within all 123 Seattle census tracts. A multilevel ordinal logistic regression model is used for statistical estimation because individuals nested in the same neighborhood or tract tend to be more similar to each other than to individuals living in other areas.²² Multilevel modeling estimates both individual and neighborhood level residuals, to

address the partial interdependence of individuals within the same location.²³ Additionally, multilevel modeling allows for the examination of both higher and lower level variance for the outcome variable, while maintaining the appropriate level of analysis for the independent variables.²⁴ Within the multilevel modeling technique, mixed effects were calculated.

The investigation is conducted using Stata 14.2.²⁵ The analyses proceeded in three stages. First, Chi-squared tests (not presented here) were run to analyze the relationship between the categorical predictor variables. While some showed statistically significant relationships, Cramer's V indicated a weak association among these relationships. Second, an unconditional model was estimated to examine the distribution of perceived ONACC efficacy. Significant variation in perceptions would provide evidence for further multilevel testing. Finally, an intercepts-as-outcome model was analyzed to examine the relationship between the predictor variables and ONACC efficacy, accounting for other individual-level covariates.

Table A1

Descriptive Statistics Total N = 1565

Variable(s)	mean	sd	min	max
Organized Neighborhood Associations and Community Clubs	1.196	0.632	0	2
Female	0.492	0.5	0	1
Age	47.14	15.22	18	91
Length of Residence	10.54	11.1	0	62
Home Owner	0.655	0.476	0	1
Educational Attainment	2.923	0.957	1	4
Married	0.742	0.438	0	1
Race (White as Reference)				
Black	0.0454	0.208	0	1
Asian	0.0601	0.238	0	1
Latino	0.0428	0.202	0	1
Income (< 25K as reference)				
\$25K - \$75K	0.498	0.5	0	1
> \$75K	0.365	0.482	0	1
Predictor				
Personal Fear	7.156	2.459	4	16
Social Integration				
Individual Interactions	4.262	2.532	0	10
SPD Block Activity Participation	0.293	0.455	0	1
Other Block Activity Participation	0.463	0.499	0	1
Neighborhood				
Trust	2.172	2.167	0	10
Disorder	12.59	2.02	4	16
Informal Social Control	11.82	2.472	4	16

Results

Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 1, including the mean and standard deviation.

49 percent of the respondents identified as female. The average age of respondents was 47.14

years old, and the average respondent has lived in the neighborhood about 10.54 years.

Respondents' race/ethnicity variables were a series of binary measures, with whites used for a reference group, indicating whether respondents identified as: Black ($\bar{x} = .045$), Asian ($\bar{x} = .06$), and Latino ($\bar{x} = .04$). Most respondents were homeowners (66 percent), had some college education ($\bar{x} = 2.93$) and was measured on an ordinal scale ranging from one (high school or less) to four (graduate school/professional), and are or have been married (74 percent). Regarding income, 50 percent of respondents reported household income in the \$25K to \$75K ranged, while 37 percent or respondents reported household income of over \$75K.

For the predictor variables, individual interaction on a scale of 0-10, has a mean of 4.26, with a standard deviation of 2.53. This means less than half of the respondents reported having engaged in all the types of neighborly behavior that are examined in this study. Of respondents, 46 percent have participated in block activity with their neighbors, while 29 percent have participated in block activity with the Seattle Police Department. Personal fear on a scale of 4-16, has a mean of 7.16, with a standard deviation of 2.46. Additionally, perception of social control, on a scale of 4-16, has a mean of 11.82, with a standard deviation of 2.47. Perception of neighborhood trust, on a scale of 0-10, has a mean of 2.17, with a standard deviation of 2.173. Finally, disorder, on a scale of 4-16, has a mean of 12.59, with a standard deviation of 2.02. This mean most respondents do not perceived their neighborhood as having disorder.

From Table 2, the results for the null model showed that the between tract variance is 0.188, which is the variance in the intercepts across all tracts. Another method is to look at the ratio of variance in the intercept and its standard error, $0.188/.066 = 2.848$, which is larger than 2

and indicates that the between tract variance is significant. Additionally, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) shows that census tracts can explain roughly 5 percent of the total variance ($ICC = 0.188 / (0.188 + \pi^2 / 3)$). Based on these results, individual and neighborhood level predictors were added to investigate our main research questions. Regarding the full model ($p < 0.001$), the demographic variable of length of residence (odds ratio = 0.99; $p < .05$) has a significantly negative relationship with perceiving ONACC as highly effective. The full model simultaneously tested the predictor variables. According to the theoretical framework presented earlier, this study expects to see a positive relationship between engaging in individual interactions, prior participation in SPD or other block activity, neighborhood trust, informal social control, and perceived ONACC efficacy.

Table A2:
Organized Neighborhood Associations and Community Clubs
Multilevel Ordinal Regression

Variable(s)	Null		Full		Odds Ratio
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	
Demographic					
Female			0.188+	0.103	1.207
Age			0.002	0.005	1.002
Length of Residence			-0.012*	0.006	0.988
Home Owner			0.144	0.139	1.155
Educational Attainment			0.045	0.058	1.046
Married			0.008	0.133	1.008
Race (White as Reference)					
Black			0.188	0.257	1.206
Asian			0.078	0.222	1.081
Latino			0.312	0.261	1.366
Income (< 25K as reference)					
\$25K - \$75K			0.184	0.166	1.201
> \$75K			-0.156	0.193	0.856
Predictor					
Personal Fear			0.003	0.024	0.997
Social Integration					
Individual Interactions			0.051*	0.024	1.053
SPD Block Activity Participation			0.315*	0.082	1.371
Other Block Activity Participation			0.448***	0.116	1.565
Neighborhood					
Trust			0.163***	0.033	1.177
Disorder			0.018	0.029	1.018
Informal Social Control			0.075**	0.026	1.078
Variance Constant	0.188	0.066	0.051	0.046	
Model X ²				156.75	
P				0.001	
Log Likelihood	-1476.75			-1387.04	
n		1565		1565	

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Additionally, a negative relationship is expected with increases in personal fear and neighborhood disorder and perceived efficacy for ONACC.

First, personal fear is not statistically significant in terms of perception of effectiveness for ONACC. Also, “increases in perceived neighborhood disorder” is not a significant predictor for perception of high efficacy for ONACC. However, some predictor variables are significant, in terms of perceiving ONACC as highly effective at solving major problems in the respondent’s neighborhood. Increases in individual interactions is positively associated with perceiving high efficacy for ONACC ($p < 0.05$). Neighborly interactions increased the odds by 5 percent, of perceiving ONACC being highly effective by a factor of 1.053. Additionally, having participated in SPD block activity is positively associated with ONACC being highly effective ($p < 0.05$). Prior participation in police block activity increases the odds, by 37 percent, of perceiving ONACC as highly effective by a factor of 1.371. Having participated in other block activity is positively associated with ONACC being highly effective ($p < 0.001$). Prior participation in other activity block activity increases the odds, by 56.5 percent, of perceiving ONACC as highly effective by a factor of 1.565.

Next, perceiving neighborhood trust and informal social control are statistically significant. Increases in perceived neighborhood trust (odds ratio = 1.177; $p < 0.001$) and increases in perceived social control (odds ratio = 1.078; $p < 0.01$) are positively associated with perceiving ONACC, as being highly effective. The odds ratio for perceiving ONACC highly effective increases by 17.7 percent for increases in perceived neighborhood trust; the odds ratio

for perceiving ONACC as highly effective increases by roughly 8 percent for increases in informal social control.

Discussion

This work proposes and examines several research questions which analyze the relationship between various social components, address personal concerns about fear, and examine the perception of problem-solving efficacy for nonprofits, such as neighborhood associations and community clubs. By including measures for perceived disorder or incivility in the neighborhood, engaging in neighborly interactions, neighborhood trust, informal social control, personal fear, and prior participation in Seattle police department block or other neighborhood block activities, this study examines the influence these measures have on perceptions of the effectiveness of formally organized neighborhood association methods for solving a major problem. Several findings emerge.

First, the results of the multilevel regression models demonstrate contrasting relationships between individual and neighborhood characteristics and perceptions of high efficacy for ONACC. The predictor variables of engaging in neighborly interactions, prior participation in both police-led and other block activities, perceiving neighborhood trust, and informal social control have a significant positive influence on the full model. However, the demographic variable of length of residence has a significant negative influence.

Second, increases in neighborhood trust and social control within a neighborhood appears to have positive effects on whether a person will perceive ONACC as being highly effective. This finding advances the academic inquiry into the impact and influence that perceptions of

neighborhood collectiveness have on respondents' perception of other social phenomena.²⁶ If this is a consistent finding, then local organized neighborhood associations, community groups, and community clubs should continue initiatives that will help the citizens of a given area cultivate more unity, as well as foster the capability of the neighborhood to administer control. Increases in trust and control between the residents may allow access for the organized groups to engage the citizens and build working coalitions to address various social issues. The impact of perceived neighborhood trust and social control may also influence the neighborhood's ability to acquire and mobilize necessary resources to address problems.²⁷ Neighborhoods with working collective efficacy help the government better allocate resources to other locations that need services.

In addition, a person's prior participation in police and other block activities in the neighborhood seem to impact perceptions of ONACC, in terms of whether they are thought to be highly effective at addressing major problems. The findings regarding prior participation in block activity in the neighborhood, as a predictor variable, reaffirm previous analyses of the impact of community engagement.²⁸ Having participated previously in a block activity in one's neighborhood has a positive impact on the odds of perceiving that the neighborhood association or community clubs have high efficacy in terms of their problem-solving capacities. This result might stem from the respondent having firsthand knowledge of the inner workings of these different types of organizations and may shape an individual's perception of these groups' policies and directives, management skills, and ability to aid in addressing certain social issues. If this is the case, then organized neighborhood groups should work to engage the citizens in increasing their access to resources that will help the neighborhood understand and participate in

social policymaking.²⁹ In recent times, there is a growing sentiment of distrust in the aspects of the State including policing agencies; thus, promoting of quality human relationships in less socially integrated neighborhoods is necessary to strengthen communities and local institutions.³⁰ ONACC should continue to act as a resource for neighborhoods in need of assistance, continue to facilitate positive interactions between the citizens themselves, and create opportunities for positive interactions between citizens and government agencies.

Limitations and Future Direction

Limitations to the present study should be noted. This study uses secondary data to test these hypotheses and the lack of consistent census tract identification with previous studies of Seattle inhibits the ability to ascribe the results to any specific census tract or location, thus allowing for comparative analyses.³¹ In terms of future research, further examination is warranted into the impact that organized neighborhood and community clubs, in conjunction with various social components, have on concerns about the efficacy of this approach. This future research should address the relationship between overall location and engagement with ONACC. To address this, research into different residential areas, such as apartment complexes versus primarily homeowner areas, should aid in the understanding of the perceptions of which approaches are highly effective or not as highly effective. Additional research is needed concerning the impact living near dual zoned (residential and commercial) areas has on the respondents' perceptions of ONACC. A line of inquiry should consider the influence that communication between community organizations and the residents, coupled with a person's perception of the ethnic composition in each area, influence a person's perception of a community

organization's effectiveness. Finally, further examination into the impact that this studies' predictor variables have on perceptions of efficacy should determine if these results are conversely true, by studying perceptions of whether this approach to problem solving is not effective at all. This type of study would allow for analyses into whether increases in an individual's perception of collective efficacy decrease the likelihood of perceiving organized neighborhood groups as being not effective at all.

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